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ABSTRACT

STRIVE was a special instructional program which provided a nurturing, caring, intensive instructional milieu for over-aged, low-performing ninth graders, who were perceived to be at risk of dropping out of school, at Barbara Jordan High School for Careers in Houston (Texas) during the 1988-89 school year. This report evaluates the effectiveness of the STRIVE project in improving student academic performance, and their attitudes toward themselves, learning, and class attendance. The following findings are presented: (1) STRIVE students significantly outperformed the non-STRIVE students in reading, mathematics, social studies, and science on the Metropolitan Achievement Test-Sixth Edition (MAT-6); (2) 47 percent of the students indicated that their desire to attend school every day had increased; (3) 65 percent of the students expressed increased appreciation for their teachers; (4) 57 percent of the students indicated that the program had helped them feel better about themselves; (5) 70 percent of the students stated that they felt more confident in their ability to improve their grades; (6) 90 percent of the students expressed that they would encourage other at-risk ninth graders to enroll in the program; (7) both STRIVE and non-STRIVE students' mean attendance rates declined, but the STRIVE students had a smaller margin of decline than the non-STRIVE students; and (8) 25 percent of the students left the program during the 1988-89 school year. One table is included. (JS)

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The Strive Project:

A Special "Pull-Out" Instructional Program for At-Risk Ninth Grade Students

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THE STRIVE PROJECT:
A SPECIAL "PULL OUT" INSTRUCTIONAL PROGRAM
FOR AT-RISK NINTH GRADE STUDENTS, 1988-1989

STRIVE was a special "pull-out" instructional program for a group of over-aged, low performing ninth graders, who were perceived to be at-risk of dropping out of school. This report evaluates the effectiveness of the program in improving student academic performance, and their attitudes toward themselves, learning, and class attendance. The program was effective in achieving its goals.

The STRIVE project was implemented in 1987-88 school year by HISD as a pilot program, in the District's search for innovative and effective ways for addressing the problem of educating the academically disadvantaged and at-risk students of the urban secondary schools. This project was specifically geared towards the over-aged, low performing ninth graders, who were at-risk of dropping out of senior high school. The purpose of the project was to provide a nurturing, caring, and an intensive instructional milieu that could help improve students attitude towards learning, class attendance, and subsequently improve their academic performance.

The project was located at Barbara Jordan High School for Careers, and was generally operated in isolation from the regular student population, in a separate building specifically designated for the project. The STRIVE students were organized separately from the rest of the school's ninth graders, and attended classes designed solely for them.

The program had four teachers, one for each of the following content areas: English language arts, mathematics, social studies and science. One counselor was assigned to the program students to address the affective needs of the students and served as the liaison person between the program and the parents of the students. The teachers worked as a cohesive team to address the instructional needs of the students. Furthermore the teachers had common planning periods and worked collaboratively with the counselor to address the needs of the students from a wholistic perspective. A variety of enrichment activities, such as field trips and remedial activities were also conducted during the school year for the students.

EVALUATION DESIGN AND METHODS

The purpose of this final report was to assess the effectiveness of the program in improving student academic performance, class attendance, and attitudes towards learning. Specifically, the following questions were addressed by this report:

1) What are the 1988 and 1989 MAT-6 mean grade equivalent scores of the STRIVE and Non STRIVE students for mathematics, reading, science, and social studies?

2) Are there any significant differences between the 1989 MAT-6 Total Complete Battery grade equivalent scores of the STRIVE and Non STRIVE students on the following sub-tests: mathematics, reading, science, and social studies?

3) What percentage of the STRIVE students indicate that their participation in the program has increased their desire to attend school everyday, their appreciation of their teachers, their feelings about themselves, and their confidence in their ability to improve their grades?

4) What are the attendance rates of the STRIVE and Non STRIVE students for the 1987-88 and 1988-89 school years?

5) What is the drop-out rate of the STRIVE students during 1988-89?

Student test data used in this report consist of the Metropolitan Achievement Test-Sixth Edition (MAT-6) results of 1988 and 1989 testing years. Student attendance records have also been discussed. A questionnaire survey was given to students in the four program classes on May 16, 1989. Other data for this report were collected in May of 1989 from the four program teachers through unstructured and informal interviews.

Statistical analysis

An Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) model was used to evaluate the effectiveness of the program. An ANCOVA is a form of analysis of variance that tests the significance of the differences between means of final experimental data by taking into account the correlation between the dependent variable and one or more covariates, and by adjusting initial mean differences.

In order to assess the effectiveness of the program a control group was selected from the group of students, who had been invited to enroll in the STRIVE program in the 1988-89 school year but refused to accept the offer. This group of seventy five students—referred to in the analysis as Non-STRIVE students—attended their ninth grade in other HISD senior high schools during the school year. There were eighty-one students in the experimental group (i. e. STRIVE students). Thirteen of the STRIVE students were not included in the analysis, since they entered the program from the seventh grade and therefore did not have the appropriate eighth grade test data. Furthermore, twenty students

left the program during the year for a variety of reasons, including transfers to other District high schools.

The unit of analysis was the individual student, while the *factor* for the analytical model was the *group* (STRIVE or Non STRIVE). The dependent variables on which the two groups were compared were the 1989 MAT-6 grade equivalent scores of the students in the following content areas: reading, mathematics, social studies, and science. The corresponding 1988 MAT-6 scores of the students were used as the covariates in the analysis.

One limitation of the analysis is the lack of test data on several STRIVE and Non STRIVE students, which subsequently reduced the number of students whose grades could be used in the analysis. Another possible limitation is the fact that the STRIVE students self-selected themselves to participate in the program. There was, therefore, no opportunity for random assignment of students to the two groups. In effect, one should not rule out entirely the possibility that the two student groups could have had pre-existing differences, which might have introduced systematic bias into the analysis. For instance, if there were any pre-existing group differences in levels of motivation to learn, it is possible that it could have had some influence on the results of the analysis.

RESULTS

Student Performance

Table 1
MAT-6 Mean Grade Equivalent Scores
ANCOVA of Independent And Dependent Variables

Content Area	Group (size)	1988 Observed Group Mean	1989 Observed Group Mean	1989 Adjusted Group Mean
Reading	STRIVE (n=34)	6.7	7.6	7.3*
	Non STR.(n=21)	6.1	6.3	6.7
Mathematics	STRIVE (n=33)	6.6	7.6	7.6*
	Non STR.(n=20)	6.5	6.4	6.5
Social Studies	STRIVE (n=34)	7.0	7.6	7.5*
	Non STR.(n=20	6.8	6.4	6.5
Science	STRIVE (n=34)	7.6	7.8	7.8*
	Non STR.(n=20)	7.6	7.3	7.3

*Significant (P <.001)

Table 1 demonstrates that the STRIVE students significantly outperformed the Non STRIVE students in all of the four content areas. It must, however, be mentioned that even

though the STRIVE students performed better than the Non STRIVE students, a look at their 1989 scores indicates the following moderate gains over the 1988 scores: reading, nine academic months; mathematics, ten academic months; social studies, six academic months; and science, two academic months. Except for reading in which the Non STRIVE students achieved two academic months higher than their 1988 score, they experienced the following decreases in their mean grade equivalent scores between 1988 and 1989: mathematics, one month decrease; social studies, four months decrease; and science, three months decrease.

Affective Variables

Through a questionnaire survey the students were asked to assess the extent to which the program had improved their attitudes toward school, their teachers, themselves, and their ability to succeed in school. The following were the findings:

- 47% of the students indicated that their desire to attend school everyday had increased either slightly (15%) or considerably (32%), while 17% indicated that their desire had decreased;
- 65% of the students expressed that their appreciation for their teachers had increased considerably;
- 57% of the students indicated that the program had helped them to feel better about themselves;
- 70% of the students stated that they felt more confident in their ability to improve their grades and consequently succeed in school;
- 90% of the students expressed that they would highly encourage other at-risk ninth graders to enroll in the program;

Attendance Rates

The mean attendance rate of the STRIVE students (n=74) declined from 89.3% in 1987-88 to 82.8%in the 1988-89 school year. The mean attendance rate of the Non STRIVE students(n=59), also declined from 85.7% in 1987-88 to 75.2% in the 1988-89 school year. Even though both groups experienced a decline in their mean attendance rates, the STRIVE students had a smaller margin of decline than the Non STRIVE students.

Student Drop-out Rate

Overall, 25% of the program students left the program during the 1988-89 school year for a variety of reasons, including transfers to other District high schools.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

This 1988-89 evaluation shows that the program was instrumental in having a considerable positive impact on many pertinent affective and academic performance variables. In the words of the four teachers of the program: "*Many of the STRIVE students are actually more capable than the regular students, but they seem bored with school and life in general. They have no passion for their lives, they give the impression of existing, not living for any purpose. We as teachers therefore spend much of our time improving self esteem and instilling the desire to succeed*". The results of this evaluation show that the program staff understood what they were up against, and did meet the contextual challenges of the program effectively.

Even though the program students' test scores between 1988 and 1989 were not considerable enough to bring their mean grade equivalent scores to the national norm, their group mean scores did not experience such declines as were experienced by the Non STRIVE students. Furthermore, according to the students and their teachers, considerable growth was experienced in the affective domain, which could be one of the critical determining factors of their success in the senior high school.